

Chapter 4
SURF ZONE HYDRODYNAMICS

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Table of Contents

	Page
II-4-1. Introduction	II-4-1
II-4-2. Surf Zone Waves	II-4-1
<i>a. Incipient wave breaking</i>	II-4-1
(1) Breaker type	II-4-1
(2) Breaker criteria	II-4-3
(3) Regular waves	II-4-3
(4) Irregular waves	II-4-4
<i>b. Wave transformation in the surf zone</i>	II-4-5
(1) Similarity method	II-4-5
(2) Energy flux method	II-4-6
(3) Irregular waves	II-4-8
(4) Waves over reefs	II-4-10
II-4-3. Wave Setup	II-4-11
II-4-4. Wave Runup on Beaches	II-4-14
<i>a. Regular waves</i>	II-4-14
<i>b. Irregular waves</i>	II-4-15
II-4-5. Infragravity Waves	II-4-19
II-4-6. Nearshore Currents	II-4-19
<i>a. Introduction</i>	II-4-19
<i>b. Longshore current</i>	II-4-22
<i>c. Cross-shore current</i>	II-4-23
<i>d. Rip currents</i>	II-4-24
II-4-7. References	II-4-27
II-4-8. Definitions of Symbols	II-4-35
II-4-9. Acknowledgments	II-4-38

List of Figures

	Page
Figure II-4-1. Breaker types	II-4-2
Figure II-4-2. Breaker depth index as a function of $H_b/(gT^2)$ (Weggel 1972)	II-4-5
Figure II-4-3. Change in wave profile shape from outside the surf zone (a,b) to inside the surf zone (c,d). Measurements from Duck, North Carolina (Ebersole 1987)	II-4-7
Figure II-4-4. Transformation of H_{rms} with depth based on the initial wave approach and the Dally, Dean, and Dalrymple (1985) model	II-4-9
Figure II-4-5. NMLONG simulation of wave height transformation (Leadbetter Beach, Santa Barbara, California, 3 Feb 1980 (Thornton and Guza 1986))	II-4-10
Figure II-4-6. Shallow-water transformation of wave spectra (solid line - incident, $d = 3.0m$; dotted line - incident breaking zone, $d = 1.7m$; dashed line - surf zone, $d = 1.4m$)	II-4-11
Figure II-4-7. Definition sketch for wave setup	II-4-12
Figure II-4-8. Irregular wave setup for plane slope of $1/100$	II-4-14
Figure II-4-9. Irregular wave setup for plane slope of $1/30$	II-4-15
Figure II-4-10. Example problem II-4-2	II-4-16
Figure II-4-11. Definition sketch for wave runup	II-4-17
Figure II-4-12. Definition of runup as local maximum in elevation	II-4-17
Figure II-4-13. Measured cross-shore and longshore flow velocities	II-4-20
Figure II-4-14. Nearshore circulation systems	II-4-21
Figure II-4-15. Longshore current profiles (solid line - no lateral mixing; dashed lines - with lateral mixing)	II-4-24
Figure II-4-16. Equation II-4-37 compared with field and laboratory data (Komar 1979)	II-4-25
Figure II-4-17. NMLONG simulation of longshore current (Leadbetter Beach, Santa Barbara, California, 3 Feb 1989 (Thornton and Guza 1986))	II-4-26
Figure II-4-18. Field measurement of cross-shore flow on a barred profile (Duck, North Carolina, October 1990)	II-4-27

Chapter II-4 Surf Zone Hydrodynamics

II-4-1. Introduction

a. Waves approaching the coast increase in steepness as water depth decreases. When the wave steepness reaches a limiting value, the wave breaks, dissipating energy and inducing nearshore currents and an increase in mean water level. Waves break in a water depth approximately equal to the wave height. The *surf zone* is the region extending from the seaward boundary of wave breaking to the limit of wave uprush. Within the surf zone, wave breaking is the dominant hydrodynamic process.

b. The purpose of this chapter is to describe shallow-water wave breaking and associated hydrodynamic processes of wave setup and setdown, wave runup, and nearshore currents. The surf zone is the most dynamic coastal region with sediment transport and bathymetry change driven by breaking waves and nearshore currents. Surf zone wave transformation, water level, and nearshore currents must be calculated to estimate potential storm damage (flooding and wave damage), calculate shoreline evolution and cross-shore beach profile change, and design coastal structures (jetties, groins, seawalls) and beach fills.

II-4-2. Surf Zone Waves

The previous chapter described the transformation of waves from deep to shallow depths (including refraction, shoaling, and diffraction), up to wave breaking. This section covers incipient wave breaking and the transformation of wave height through the surf zone.

a. Incipient wave breaking. As a wave approaches a beach, its length L decreases and its height H may increase, causing the wave steepness H/L to increase. Waves break as they reach a limiting steepness, which is a function of the relative depth d/L and the beach slope $\tan \beta$. Wave breaking parameters, both qualitative and quantitative, are needed in a wide variety of coastal engineering applications.

(1) Breaker type.

(a) *Breaker type* refers to the form of the wave at breaking. Wave breaking may be classified in four types (Galvin 1968): as spilling, plunging, collapsing, and surging (Figure II-4-1). In *spilling breakers*, the wave crest becomes unstable and cascades down the shoreward face of the wave producing a foamy water surface. In *plunging breakers*, the crest curls over the shoreward face of the wave and falls into the base of the wave, resulting in a high splash. In *collapsing breakers* the crest remains unbroken while the lower part of the shoreward face steepens and then falls, producing an irregular turbulent water surface. In *surging breakers*, the crest remains unbroken and the front face of the wave advances up the beach with minor breaking.

(b) Breaker type may be correlated to the surf similarity parameter ξ_o , defined as

$$\xi_o = \tan \beta \left(\frac{H_o}{L_o} \right)^{-\frac{1}{2}} \quad (\text{II-4-1})$$

where the subscript o denotes the deepwater condition (Galvin 1968, Battjes 1974). On a uniformly sloping beach, breaker type is estimated by